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those provision including payments for practicing in rural areas by paying them less for their work, even though they have the same training as their urban counterparts. This provides an 18-month extension that sets a "floor," or minimum payment adjustment to compensate physicians.

• **Improves Access to Telehealth Services** When medical facilities are few and far between, and fewer providers serve a larger region, Telemedicine can bring far-away resources close to rural seniors in need. This law will make Telehealth services to seniors available through Medicare at a greater number of health facilities, including hospital-based renal dialysis facilities, skilled nursing facilities and community mental health centers.

• **Retains Access to Medicare Advantage** The vast majority of rural beneficiaries continue to receive care under the traditional Medicare Fee-For-Service program. Only 6 percent of rural beneficiaries join Medicare Advantage, most of whom have joined private fee-for-service plans (PFFS). While this law requires that PFFS plans in counties with several plan choices must create provider networks, PFFS plans in rural areas without other plan options can continue to operate as they do today.

Minimum Wage Increase Kick In

Next week the federal minimum wage will rise from \$5.85 to \$6.55 an hour. In North Carolina, it will mean an increase from \$6.15 to \$6.55 per hour.

This is the result of legislation enacted by Congress in May 2007 that will raise the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$7.25 an hour over a two-year period. The increase in the minimum wage to \$7.25 an hour over two years will benefit 12.4 million workers across the country – both directly and indirectly --- including 611,000 workers in North Carolina.

For ten years, the minimum wage was frozen at \$5.15 an hour. This was the longest period in the history of the minimum wage law that minimum wage workers failed to get an increase. As a result, minimum wage workers fell further and further behind.

The minimum wage legislation enacted by Congress in 2007 increases the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$7.25 an hour, in three steps, over two years. Under the legislation, the minimum wage was increased from \$5.15 to \$5.85 on July 24, 2007; will increase to \$6.55 on July 24, 2008; and will increase to \$7.25 on July 24, 2009. The increase to \$7.25 an hour will mean an additional \$4,400 per year for a minimum wage worker's family – helping them to try to keep up with rising costs.

Raising the minimum wage is a key step in working to strengthen the economy for all Americans, not just for the privileged few.

Domestic Oil and Natural Gas Production Legislation Stalls

While legislation aimed at lowering energy prices by increasing domestic oil and natural gas production was approved by a House majority, it failed to get the two-thirds vote needed to pass.

The House voted 244 to 173 in favor of the Drill Responsibly in Leased Lands Act of 2008 (DRILL Act), H.R. 6515, leaving the bill 46 votes short of passage. The bill promoted the responsible domestic production of oil and natural gas, particularly in 20 million acres of the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska.

Currently, there are 68 million acres of federal land already leased by oil companies for energy production but are now but sitting idle. That means that 75% of the leased public lands are sitting idle.

This bill would push for increased domestic production by:

o speeding development of the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A) by requiring the Secretary of Interior to offer at least one lease sale annually in the NPR-A;

o reinstating the Alaskan export ban that was in place from 1973 to 1995. It was imposed to ensure that American oil helps the American people. In 2000, about 7% of crude oil production from the Alaskan North Slope was exported to South Korea, Japan, and China;

o incorporating a "Use It or Lose It" approach on oil and natural gas leases. This simply requires oil producers to drill on the leases they already have or relinquish them so that another company can produce the oil there;

o calling on the President to use the powers of his office to facilitate the completion of oil pipelines into the NPR-A and to facilitate the construction of an Alaska natural gas pipeline to the continental United States to move the product to market. The Alaska natural gas pipeline could create up to 100,000 jobs.

Energy Efficient Buildings

The House Energy and Commerce Committee's Subcommittee on Energy and Air Quality held a hearing this week focused on the potential for making American buildings more energy efficient as part of the strategy for reducing energy consumption and greenhouse gases.

According to the Department of Energy, buildings are responsible for 39 percent of U.S. energy consumption. They consume 10 percent of global energy and are responsible for a similar percentage of global greenhouse gas emissions. Building efficiency technology is already on the shelf, and in many cases represents an inexpensive means of making major reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

At the start of the hearing, I made the following opening statement:

As we proceed in our ongoing discussions on curbing greenhouse gas emissions and becoming a more energy-efficient nation, I appreciate the opportunity to discuss building efficiency and its immense adaptability into our overall goals.

With 40 percent of the United States' energy consumption coming from commercial and residential buildings, raising efficiency and greening our buildings provides a clear path toward lowering our carbon footprint in a relatively low-cost yet highly scalable capacity. Already, local chapters of United States Green Building Councils have sprung up across the nation, promoting building projects that are efficient and sustainable.

I want to bring attention to a project in my hometown of Wilson, North Carolina, that is saving energy and reducing emissions through the employment of effective design and engineering changes.

Wilson Community College recently constructed a new Student Center on campus that was designed using the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards established by the U. S. Green Building Council. LEED certification at the gold level is targeted for the building.

Energy efficient features of this building include high efficiency windows that operate automatically on a computerized climate control system; the use of natural light for building illumination; and solar collectors which provide heat and hot water. Studies using DOE assistance indicate that this building will use fifty to sixty percent less energy than a normal new building of similar size built to existing codes.

The Wilson Community College Student Center's efficiency improvements are projected to pay for themselves ten times over in energy savings during the building's lifetime.

I am impressed with the cost-effective steps my friends in Wilson have taken to improve energy efficiency and reduce their carbon footprint. While it may not be feasible to assume that we can all use solar panels to heat our homes and businesses, replacing windows and appliances and other low-cost changes can make a tremendous impact on overall energy consumption.

I appreciate the opportunity to participate in this hearing and look forward to our witnesses' testimony on what we can do to spur others to take these progressive steps.

Washington, DC Summer 2008 Interns



Summer 2008 Congressional Interns: (from left) Justin Clayton, Rep. G. K. Butterfield, Haley Phillips, and David Lanier

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